Nestle's Fip-Fop Club: The Making of Child Audiences in Non-Commercial Film Shows in Switzerland (1936-1959)

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If one asks elderly people in Switzerland about their first film experience, one will most probably receive a somehow cryptic response: Fip-Fop – a designation that, for several generations, seems to have been the conspiratorial code for childhood cinema experience, which, even fifty years later, still makes an interviewee’s eyes glow. Fip-Fop is the magic word that evokes the collective memories of children’s cinema-going in Switzerland from the 1930s to the late 1950s.

Fip-Fop was a film club open to all children aged five to fifteen. Although run on a non-commercial basis outside theatrical film circles, the Club’s governing body was neither the state nor a non-profit organisation, but a private company. Within an institutional frame of corporate sponsoring by the Nestlé Food Corporation, several generations of children were socialized with the medium of film and gathered their first experiences and long-lasting memories of cinema-going. Although the Club was officially closed in 1959, a couple of long grown-up ex-members have continued it in an informal way up until today. Thus, the Fip-Fop Club is still alive, not only as memories in individual media biographies, but as a social practice.

From an institutional perspective, the Fip-Fop Club was an extraordinary marketing strategy that worked most successfully in the Swiss test market. But it was a costly experiment that devoured more than one third of Nestlé’s total chocolate marketing budget.1 Due to the high costs involved, the concept was not adopted by foreign Nestlé subsidiaries. Therefore, the Fip-Fop Club has remained a unique Swiss episode. The same holds true for the film experiences made by child audiences within the Club.

Despite its singularity, the Fip-Fop Club provides an exemplary case to study film reception both from the producer’s and from the consumer’s side, moreover with a focus on children and non-commercial film shows.

that is, an audience segment and an exhibition practice that are equally under-researched.

This paper intends to outline the making, entertaining, and educating of child audiences outside commercial cinema, and to sketch child spectatorship and film consumption as a social practice including consumer activism, fandom, and long-term remembrance. The Fip-Fop audience is approached from an historical-pragmatic perspective that focuses on the interrelations between institutional framings, exhibition contexts, and film form, and draws attention to the impact of contextual screening factors on the production of meaning (Kessler 2002). Such an approach to spectatorship includes a reconstruction of the dispositif in which films are screened and viewed: the institutional framing, the viewing context, the modes of address, and the viewed content, that is, the films themselves. By using the term dispositif to designate the determining factors of film reception, I draw on Frank Kessler’s re-interpreting and further developing of Jean-Louis Baudry’s theory of the appareil de base (the “apparatus” of which the dispositif is one aspect) from the early 1970s into a fruitful pragmatic concept that allows one to historicize the configuration of technology, text, and spectatorship (Kessler 2006). By integrating institutional framings, exhibition practices, modes of address, and modes of reception, the dispositif is an appropriate concept to illuminate the distinct features of theatrical and non-commercial film practices, and to capture alternative modes of film reception beyond commercial cinema. It can thereby account for the changing functions and functioning of films in different screening contexts, and help determine historical changes as well as continuities.

By reconstructing the dispositif of Nestlé’s film shows, the following study on the Fip-Fop child audiences locates film reception at the crossroads of popular media culture, consumer culture, and memory culture in order to bring into sharper focus the multiple functioning and functions of film and cinema.2

Institutional framing: Nestlé’s Fip-Fop Club

The Fip-Fop Club was founded in 1936 by Karl Lauterer, head of the Nestlé marketing department in Switzerland. Fip and Fop are the names of two advertising characters, a twin brother and sister, who were created

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2 To date, the Fip-Fop Club has attracted very little academic interest. There is an unpublished Master’s thesis in History by Matthey 2003 that focuses on advertising in Switzerland. Film and media studies have not yet paid attention to the topic, as Cosandey 2002 hints at in a short Internet contribution on the subject.
by the renowned Swiss graphic designer Hans Tomamichel in 1932 to promote Cailler and Kohler chocolate brands. In the context of the Great Depression of the 1930s, which deeply affected the export business of chocolate and other consumer goods, Nestlé reinforced its marketing investments to raise sales in the home market. The corporation thereby focused on one specific consumer group, namely children. From a corporate perspective, the Fip-Fop Club had an explicit mid-term commercial goal, which Alfons Helbling, head of Nestlé marketing, summarized as to “arouse consumer interest” in children and to “train them as future customers.”

Since the introduction of ‘modern advertising’ by the food and consumer goods industry in the second half of the nineteenth century, children were a courted consumer group, but a most delicate one. Child marketing had to meet moral standards by merging advertising and entertainment with education in order to be approved by parents and teachers. Therefore, the Fip-Fop Club was designed as a “youth movement” modelled on the Boy Scout Association to integrate advertising into a larger ideological frame based on bourgeois ideas, Christian values, and humanist traditions. The Club presented itself as a morally impeccable school for life, which instructed children on socially compliant and politically responsible behaviour. In World War II, reminding children of their patriotic duties toward the nation and encouraging them to sympathize with children as war victims became part of the program. Nestlé taught children how to become citizens. The alliance of consumerism and citizenship was common rhetoric in corporate marketing in Switzerland: a good consumer was considered a good citizen and vice versa (Zimmermann 2007). Nestlé’s child education in citizenship was well received by parents and teachers and even state authorities: General Henry Guisan, commander-in-chief of the Swiss army in World War II, became Honorary Member of the Fip-Fop Club in 1940.

The Fip-Fop Club welcomed all children aged five to fifteen. For a one-time subscription of one Swiss Franc (half a Swiss Franc at first), the kids received the Club pin that signalled affiliation and granted cost-free

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3 Alfons Helbling, Jugendwerbung in der Schokoladen-Industrie NPCK. Typescript, June 7, 1950, p. 1 (Archives Historiques de Nestlé, NPCK F3/14). Helbling was appointed head of the Nestlé marketing department in 1942, thus displacing Karl Lauterer. His report on child marketing in the chocolate industry, a typescript of 16 pages (whereof the first 12 are paginated), is among the richest institutional sources on the Fip-Fop Club. Supposedly, the report served to legitimize the Fip-Fop expenses toward the management.

admission to the film shows and the Club magazine. The Club included and continued a predating and well-established activity based on a system of exchange, namely trading cards that were enclosed in Nestlé, Peter, Cailler and Kohler (NPCK) chocolate bars. Nestlé invested large sums in the production of lavish albums on historical, geographic, biological, and other instructive topics including vocational counselling. According to oral accounts of former Fip-Fop members, the cards were mainly traded at school. Although membership was not a precondition for obtaining trading cards (buying a bar of Nestlé chocolate would have sufficed), the trading activity introduced a social distinction into the schoolyard by recurrently raising the Fip-Fop issue, thus producing in- and out-groups and corresponding joys of inclusion or sufferings of exclusion in case parents denied their offspring access to the Club.

The Club’s second pillar was the monthly Fip-Fop magazine, published in German, French, and Italian in a total print run of 120’000 copies.

1 Teaching children “to become good patriots”: General Henry Guisan, Honoray Member of the Fip-Fop Club.
in 1949. The first volume of the French *Nouvelles de Fip-Fop* was launched in May 1937, followed by the first volume of the German *Fip-Fop Zeitung* in January 1938, and the Italian edition in 1948. The title pages are headed by the Fip and Fop characters, both designed according to contemporary gender stereotypes: Fip a prudential, well-behaved girl; Fop a bold, adventurous scallywag. With Fip and Fop, Nestlé presented children with raw models for socially compliant gender behaviour.

The Club’s third and most attractive pillar were the film shows. Each year, three Nestlé teams toured Switzerland twice and organised about 520 shows in over 300 towns and villages. The screenings took place in cinemas, theatres, town halls, and gymnasiums. Admission was free for all children sporting the Club pin or bringing along a bar of Nestlé chocolate. The minimum number of spectators per show was one hundred; the maximum 2,500. The shows had a running time of ninety minutes at most and, from 1940 onward, usually included a Swiss Newsreel (15 minutes), an animated picture in colour (10 minutes), a humoristic short fiction, a couple of Nestlé commercials, and an “instructive documentary” (20 minutes). Nestlé would buy or rent the programmed films, among them the most
popular slapstick comedies starring Charles Chaplin or Laurel & Hardy. Unfortunately, nothing is known about Nestlé’s sources of film supply and trading terms. Neither extant are the contemporary prints screened in the shows. Thanks to the recollections of a former member, it can be concluded at least in regard to Chaplin that Nestlé delighted its audiences with the one- and two-reelers produced by Mack Sennett’s Keystone Film Company and Chaplin’s Lone Star Mutual in the 1910s – short slapstick comedies that were later broadcast by television stations in afternoon programs and on children’s channels. In times of the Fip-Fop shows, Nestlé projectionists screened all films in 16mm prints for reasons of transportation, since many of the shows did not take place in movie theatres, but in locations lacking permanent projection facilities.

The Fip-Fop film shows were most popular: in 1943, they attracted 115’000 children (Cosandey 2002). By 1950, the number of spectators had risen to 220’000 per year. In 1949, the Fip-Fop Club counted 120’000 members – that is, one in eight children in Switzerland.

The huge success of the Fip-Fop shows was partly due to a lack of children’s programs in commercial movie theatres. In Switzerland, regulations for children’s access to the cinema were introduced in the 1910s to protect young people from the ‘morally destructive’ and ‘physiologically harmful’ effects that the Cinema Reform Movement ascribed to the so-called Schundfilme (‘trash and smut’ movies). Since legislation on film and cinema was enacted by the cantons and not the state, the regulations had no national scope but differed regionally. Most cantons denied children under sixteen admission to cinemas, even if accompanied by adults. Only special children’s programs authorized by regional censorship boards in the afternoon gained approval. But such screenings did not meet with success in commercial movie theatres. Mainly school teachers voiced reservations against the institution of cinema, and rejected cooperation with theatre owners. Instead, educators preferred to transfer the ‘good’ sides of the medium to school, and to integrate film as a didactic instrument into the highly regulated classroom sphere.

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8 Tante Juliette, Fip-Fop sème la joie. In: Nouvelles Fip-Fop 14,9/10, September/October 1950, p. 3.
Children and teenagers under sixteen thus being virtually excluded from cinema, commercial exhibitors were legally held off from junior audiences. Therefore, child film socialization and consumption could take place – but only beyond theatrical business. These circumstances provided non-commercial exhibitors with a monopoly for child audiences that attracted organisations with diverse incentives and induced a variety of non-theatrical exhibition practices. Private non-profit initiatives, however, such as the Schweizer Schul- und Volkskino (Swiss School and People’s Cinema), founded in 1921 to provide children and adults with ‘good’ films screened in travelling shows, lacked firm financial footing and institutional power to dominate the sector. In accordance with federal principles, state authorities refrained both from setting up and from supporting national programs, thus opening the door to private industry. Particularly corporations of the food and consumer goods industry such as Maggi, Suchard and Nestlé took the opportunity to integrate film exhibition into their marketing mix, and supplied target audiences with travelling corporate film shows for free in order to train and entertain both present and future consumers (Zimmermann 2008).

Hence, Nestlé was not the only corporation to become involved in film exhibition. It was the only one, however, to exclusively and comprehensively focus on children. By granting children continuous and controlled access to film, Nestlé bridged the above-mentioned gap in the film exhibition market. The Fip-Fop shows did indeed meet children’s needs, as the recollections of the former Club member Jean-Jacques Karlen demonstrate:

Nous savions que quelques instants plus tard la salle s’obscurcirait totalement et qu’après quelques commentaires […] apparaîtrait enfin à l’écran celui que nous attendions vraiment… Charlot… Grâce au Fip-Fop, en effet, nous avions la grande chance, une ou deux fois par an, de nous régaler des exploits de celui que nous adorions, Charlot, Charlot garçon de café, Charlot peintre, Charlot mitron, Charlot pompier…

With the help of Robinson (1989) and Internet sources, the original film titles can be reconstituted as follows: Charlot garçon de café: Caught in a Cabaret (USA 1914), produced by The Keystone Film Company (Mack Sennett), directed by Mabel Normand (two reels); Charlot peintre: The Face on the Bar Room Floor (USA 1914), produced by The Keystone Film Company (Mack Sennet), written and directed by Charles Chaplin (one reel); Charlot mitron: Dough and Dynamite (USA 1914), produced by
The exclusivity of Nestlé’s child entertainment is evidenced by another account:

Quarante ans après, ça fait drôle, mais il n’y avait pas grande chose à Martigny, c’était l’événement, on attendait la prochaine séance avec impatience. On se battait presque à certains moments pour trouver les places dans le cinéma, parce que il y avait souvent plus de monde que de places.12

The film shows provided children with a public sphere (Öffentlichkeit) for cultural and social exchange. The social practice of children’s cinema-going in the Fip-Fop Club is particularly significant for its power to integrate children into collective audiences and to build a child community: the Fip-Fop ‘family.’

The Keystone Film Company (Mack Sennett), written and directed by Charles Chaplin (one reel); Charlot pompier: THE FIREMAN (USA 1916), produced by Lone Star Mutuel, produced, written and directed by Charles Chaplin (two reels).

Oral testimony of a former Fip-Fop member, referred to in a report on the Fip-Fop Club by Ursula Bischof Scherer in the television broadcast SÜSSE SÜNDE SCHOKOLADE (NZZ Format, SF 2, television premiere: December 14, 1997). The statements are written down in: Filmtexte. Der Fip-Fop-Klub (http://www-x.nzz.ch/format/broadcasts/transcripts_126_66.html; accessed January 24, 2009). [“Forty years later, it seems strange, but there was not much going on in Martigny, it was the event, we watched out for the next screening impatiently. Sometimes, we nearly scrambled for the seats in the cinema because there were often more people than seats.”]
Spectatorship in the Fip-Fop Club: collective audience performance

The Fip-Fop Club rested on a family model that framed and informed film reception in Nestlé’s child cinema. Karl Lauterer, the founder of the Club, was its public figurehead. He officiated as the so-called ‘Godfather’ ("Grand Parrain"; “Götti”), the Club’s respectable and affectionate authority who, in the editorial of the Fip-Fop magazine, would address his readers with a personal letter signed “Your Godfather.” Lauterer is also the key character on the invitation cards to the film shows, which were designed like a call to a family party hosted by its leader. Whenever possible, Lauterer personally received his child audiences and attended the film shows. He enjoyed mingling with the kids and it seems that to him, the Club did indeed mean more than just marketing; it became family.13

In addition to the ‘Godfather,’ the Club maintained many ‘aunts’ and ‘uncles’ who officiated as conférenciers or animators of the film shows. In a

13 Lauterer also planned to initiate a “Universal Child Association” for world peace in 1944, but the project was never put into practice (Lauterer 1944). After his official retirement in 1945, Lauterer presided over the Club until 1953 when Nestlé finally made him resign from the Fip-Fop office – quite against his will – for age reasons (Matthey 2003, 162f).
program sheet announcing a series of shows in small towns and villages in the Bernese Oberland in 1939, an “Uncle Hanns” [sic] is introduced as “the cheerful lute player.” The program grants him two entries: the opening for a chat (“Onkel Hanns erzählt”) and an interlude (“Onkel Hanns singt Lieder zur Laute”). His task was to perform as a singer and musician and to present the film program that included five shorts: a Mickey Mouse film; Wasserski (Water Ski), a humorous water sports film; Die Schere als Maler (Painting Scissors), a film in colour; Tierkinder im Zoo (Baby Animals in the Zoo), featuring baby lions and droll baboons; and a puppet animation of the fairy tale Tischlein deck dich! (Table Set Yourself!).

The integration of an entertainer indicates that the shows entailed more than just the screening of films. Watching movies was therefore merely one activity among others. The shows combined media entertainment on screen with live acts on stage to stimulate audience participation. Children were animated to actively contribute to the shows by singing, calling

14 Program sheet, 1939 (Archives Historiques de Nestlé, NPCK F3/6). On implementing the Fip-Fop Club, Nestlé also organized evening shows for adults as a means of confidence building among parents, teachers, and local authorities.
Onkel Hanns
der fröhliche Lautensänger

Programm siehe Rückseite

Eintritt frei

Vorführungen Thun und Umgebung

Dürrenast Hotel Bären
Kino in Bestellung
Kinderspielstunde 15 Uhr 30
Abendvorführung 20 Uhr 30

Thun Hotel Freienhof
Kino in Bestellung
Kinderspielstunde 16 Uhr 30
Abendvorführung 20 Uhr 30

Thun Hotel Freienhof
Kino in Bestellung
Dienstag, den 19. Juni
Kinderspielstunde 16 Uhr 30
Abendvorführung 20 Uhr 30

Steffisburg Gasthof Landhaus
Kino in Bestellung
Mittwoch, den 21. Juni
Kinderspielstunde 15 Uhr 30
Abendvorführung 20 Uhr 30

Kinder kommt alle!

Es kostet nichts!

Eintritt völlig gratis!

(Eintritt für Erwachsene gemäss Rückseite)


Was will der Fip-Fop-Club?

Er will die grosse Schar der N. P. C. K. Marken-Senioren zu Stuhl und Land in einen grossen Jungendbund vereinigen, wie auch alle, die zu Sport, Spiel und fröhlicher Unterhaltung Kanonenschart suchen.

Wer Mitglied ist, ab 14 Jahren oder Bub, hat Gratis-Eintritt zu allen Vorführungen des Fip-Fop-Clubs (Filmvorführungen, Kanonenschart usw.).

Wie wird man Mitglied des Fip-Fop-Clubs?


FIP-FOP-CLUB VEVEY

PROGRAMM für Abendvorstellung

1. Onkel Hanns konfisziert.
2. Ein Mickey-Maus-Film.
3. »Wassrinka«, ein humorvoller Wasserspielfilm.
4. »Die Schale als Haken«, ein Farbenspielfilm.
5. »Tischler im Zoo«, ein Film von Bewegungen und drolligen Pikanter Hiện.
6. Onkel Hanns singt Lieder zur Laste.
7. »Tischlerin und Tischler«, ein lustiger Kanonenschart, zeigt die gefahrliche Arbeit unseres Berufes als Fischer, Wildheuer und Gemischtgänger.

(Fortsetzung der nächsten Seite)
out, and commenting on live and media performances. For this reason, the Club had its own song and its own call, which was “Hop Fip-Fop.” The collective performance of the Fip-Fop song and call recurred during the program, and it served to incorporate individual spectators into the body of the audience. The participative mode of address assigned an active role to children in the shows, not only as individual spectators in the process of film reception but also as elements of a collective audience. Spectators in Nestlé’s shows were ensemble actors, and spectatorship in the Fip-Fop Club was audience performance. Collective audience performance was indeed a determining element of the show; it was as such a third act in the auditorium, and interacted with the performances on stage and on screen and created a most vivid atmosphere. To quote a former member: “And then the atmosphere in the theatre, this was something, apart from what was on screen. It was exciting.”\(^{15}\)

In Nestlé’s film shows, audience performance blurred the conventional boundaries between actor and spectator, between screen and auditorium, and turned each show into a singular live event and each film reception into a unique film experience. Ironically or not, a private company of the (non-film) industry ultimately succeeded in putting into practice what the avant-garde had attempted – yet failed to achieve – in the 1920s and 1930s, namely to tear down the conventional barriers between film and spectator to create a total cinema of immersive film experience.\(^{16}\)

Following Tom Gunning’s (1990) distinction between ‘the cinema of attractions’ and narrative film to describe two basic presentational modes and ways of addressing the audience (exhibitionist confrontation versus diegetic absorption), Thomas Elsaesser (2000) examines the emergence of narrative cinema from the perspective of the spectator and thereby distinguishes two basic modes of film reception: the Early Cinema mode of collective audience and the mode of individual spectatorship subsequent to the narrative integration. If we consider Fip-Fop spectatorship in the light of this distinction, then the Early Cinema mode of collective audience reception obviously applies to Nestlé’s shows. The coincidence of the historically discontinuous modes of reception results from striking parallels in the dispositifs of Early Cinema and the Fip-Fop Club: both dispositifs addressed children (the one exclusively, the other not) in a direct manner with a short

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16 On the utopian aspirations of the avant-garde toward a totality of film experience by breaking open the codified, distanced, and sanitised mode of film reception, thus liberating the cinema from both mass entertainment and bourgeois art, see Hagener 2007 (especially 121–158).
film program of frequently alternating attractions that matched children’s short attention span. And although this accounts only for certain periods of Early Cinema, both dispositifs can be seen to adhere to a variety format by combining live acts with media entertainment and/or relied heavily on the live and off-screen performance of a lecturer or entertainer.

Whereas Early Cinema’s dispositif of the ‘cinema of attractions’ and its direct audience address disappeared in commercial cinema following the introduction of long feature films in the 1910s, the commented short film program was continued in non-commercial exhibition venues and widely used by corporations and other institutions until the end of the 1950s. In regard to two of its basic features – the program formula and the mode of address –, the dispositif of Early Cinema was therefore not rendered extinct by narrative integration, but expelled from commercial cinema to live on successfully in the non-commercial sector until the rise of television as a mass medium in the early 1960s. Short film programs with integrated live performances, whether entertaining or educating in nature, allowed non-commercial exhibitors to differentiate their program from commercial movie theatres. Apart from cost-free entrance, the alternative reception mode that such programs offered may be a key to explain the popularity of non-commercial film shows not only in rural regions lacking fixed
cinemas, but also in cities with a rich cinema culture. The shows offered spectators what commercial cinemas no longer offered them, namely the experience of collective spectatorship. The migration and adaptation of Early Cinema’s *dispositif* into other institutional frames and public spheres should draw closer attention to alternative forms of spectatorship practiced outside commercial cinemas. Such a focus could not only enrich film history with hitherto neglected aspects of film consumption beyond cinema, but also contribute to current debates on ‘new’ *dispositifs* of film reception raised by the digital turn and the migration of film from movie theatres and home television to art galleries, mobile phones, and the Internet. The history of film consumption teaches us that film has never been confined to cinema or television, but instead circulated in alternative frames that suggested alternative modes of film reception – frames and modes that are still awaiting in-depth research.

‘Communitization’ of spectators: film as a social technique

Within the Fip-Fop Club, the mode of collective film reception performed a crucial social function. The film shows worked as a social catalyst that welded children together to form the Fip-Fop family. The notion of ‘family’ was stimulated by the Club’s organisational structure according to a family model (including a ‘godfather’ as well as ‘aunts’ and ‘uncles’) that suggested membership to be the ticket for an alternative family affiliation, a leisure time family of friends. Within this framework, collective film consumption turned into a family ritual for the Club’s members.

According to Alexandra Schneider, the collective viewing of home movies in the family circle can be conceived as a social practice that not just confirms the family through representation, but also produces the family through media practice (2004, 13). In this perspective, collective film consumption appears to be a social technique of community building that can be aligned with what the German sociologist Max Weber calls *Vergemeinschaftung* (1990). ‘Communitization’ in Weber’s term is a constructivist process of manufacturing social bonds based on subjective senses of togetherness on emotional, affective, or traditional grounds. In the pursuit of manufacturing the social coherence of groups and organisations, collective film reception was an instrument widely used by private and public institutions to communitize individuals – be they relatives, workers, consumers, partisans, citizens, or servicemen. Nestlé’s incorporating of individual children into the Fip-Fop community by providing collective film experi-
ence is exemplary for a widespread use of film as a social technique in non-commercial exhibition circles. Film thus owed some of its community-building power to a certain rareness of the medium. Before television and video introduced home entertainment, film was not readily available but supplied on special occasions. Film consumption outside commercial cinema was therefore no daily routine, but a rare opportunity that conferred a festive aura on film reception. The working of film as a social technique is thus related to the medium’s festive character. In his study of photography in family life, Pierre Bourdieu refers to photography as a *technique de fête* (1972, 48). The same holds true for film: the mode of collective film reception is a social technique for celebrating collective film consumption, thus turning community building into a festive activity. Like annually recurring family, communal, and religious festivities, the repeated celebration of the community through film becomes a ritual to produce, confirm, and consolidate social coherence. To return to our case: Nestlé used film shows as a social technique to communitize children to the Fip-Fop Club by drawing on a reception mode that turned spectatorship into a festival. Such bi-annual collective film consumption was integrated into children’s holiday calendar and became a rite to perform the Fip-Fop family.

**Spectator activism and education in media and consumer culture**

The pronounced performative character of child audiences implies that film consumption in the Fip-Fop shows was a highly active and productive practice. Spectator activity was not confined to exhibition venues, but expanded into everyday life: Fip-Fop audiences turned out to be most productive and creative in writing letters and poems, inventing short stories and drawing pictures. The correspondence that Club members sent to ‘their Godfather’ was so abundant that Nestlé had to hire trained female correspondents to answer it. Children also participated in puzzle competitions to have their photograph as winners appear in the Fip-Fop magazine. The magazine served as an interactive communication platform where the poems, short stories, and drawings sent in by members were occasionally published. With its social network of productive consumers interacting with producers, the Fip-Fop Club is a fully fledged case of child fandom. Or in terms of Cultural Studies, Fip-Fop spectators used the Club’s offerings as cultural resources in an active and productive way to both individually and collectively appropriate what the system provided.

The system of corporate governance thus provided media culture to
introduce children to consumer culture. The corporation applied the festive social technique to business and used the community-building power of film to develop a consumer community. Therefore, introducing children to consumer culture meant introducing them to media culture first. And Nestlé did so with great care. The Fip-Fop Club was a comprehensive corporate film literacy program designed to socialize – that is, familiarize – children with the medium. Nestlé’s film education comprised both experience and knowledge. Film experience gained in the Fip-Fop shows introduced children to the delights of media consumption. The experience of individual and social gratification through consumption was meant to emotionally attach the young audiences of future customers to the Nestlé Corporation and – in a larger perspective – to attune children to the practice of commodity consumption. In the Fip-Fop Club, children experienced that consumption is gratification.

Film knowledge on the other hand was imparted to empower children to discriminate ‘good’ films from ‘bad’ ones. On leaving the Club and accessing cinema at the age of sixteen, children were meant to be capable of taking the aesthetically and morally ‘right’ choice. The Fip-Fop Club was thus an introductory course to film expertise. A case in point is the special edition of the Fip-Fop magazine dedicated to film in 1952. The edition takes care to disenchant a child’s fantasies of becoming a film star and hastens to highlight the instructional value of the documentaries screened in the Fip-Fop shows – apparently the least popular films in the program. Documentaries, so Lauterer argued, would help children to become “valuable and bright humans.” Documentary learning matters screened in the shows comprised, among others, the beautiful homeland, animal life and, of course, the manufacturing of chocolate. Fip-Fop members thus received a thorough bourgeois education in film and through film, a training to be good media consumers in order to become good commodity consumers.

Nestlé’s calculation actually worked out: the introduction of the film shows in 1936 had an immediate positive impact on chocolate sales. In 1949, a market analysis confirmed that Swiss children were more familiar with Nestlé brands than with those of other corporations and that especially young people were camps of Nestlé’s brands.

Das Märchen von Frigor + Nestlé

Ursula Baumann, Horgen


1 Bildergeschichte

Klemens Wetter, Ibach

Frigor, der Friedensbote
Hannes-Ulrich Gerber, Hitterfingen


Collective memories of child spectatorship

Luring children with popular media culture to abuse them for profit-making: the Fip-Fop Club is a real gift for materialist criticism and governance studies. Some children did indeed learn their lesson well. However, critics should take care not to underestimate the spectator – at the latest when it comes to memory. Nestlé closed the Club in 1959. In a circulation letter to Fip-Fop members, the corporation explained its discontinuance of the program as follows:


The growth in children’s access to the cinema and the increasing competition with television, which assumed a leading role in socializing children with film, compelled Nestlé to anticipate its loss of child audiences.

Although the official end was sealed fifty years ago, the Fip-Fop Club still lives on, both in the memories of former members and as a social practice. Recollections of former Fip-Foppers are published in local newspapers, circulate on the Internet, and arise in conversations. So far, they have merely survived in a short television feature – needless to say that a proper oral history project is an urgent desideratum. The collective

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20 Divers. Rundschreiben an die Mitglieder des Fip-Fop-Clubs. In: Circulaires publicité 1959 Suisse Nestlé, no further data, (Archives Historiques de Nestlé, NES). [“Twenty years ago, it was an event for a child to go to the movies. Today, you take sitting in the darkened theatre for granted. At home, television is approaching, slowly, but irresistibly, displacing radio, keeping you permanently informed on world affairs and providing distraction. [...] After careful deliberations, we came to the conclusion that we can serve you better if we devote our strengths and possibilities to the editing of finer and more interesting books that add to your knowledge and general education and have lasting value to you. Therefore, the Fip-Fop Club will discontinue its activities from September 1.”]

21 Report by Ursula Bischof Scherer in the television broadcast SÜSSE SÜNDE SCHOKOLADE (NZZ Format, SF 2, television premiere: December 14, 1997).

22 In a larger perspective, such a project could ultimately confirm and complement the results of a research project on industrial films and corporate film practice, which both highlight the dominant role of the food and consumer goods industry in socializing
memories of the Fip-Fop Club are striking in that the media aspect is far more present in the accounts of former members than the marketing aspect. The film shows are vividly recalled, whereas the institutional frame has taken a back seat. Some former members have even forgotten the company’s name. Selective remembering suggests that former members have largely “excorporated” the film shows from the marketing context, to use a term by John Fiske.23 First and foremost, memories of the Fip-Fop Club are memories of media culture and not of consumer culture, that is, memories of childhood film experiences that initiated the practice of cinema-going and the delights of film consumption. The majority of former members remained on the spectator’s side, but some became involved in film professionally and became projectionists, film reviewers, or even directors. For example, Markus Imhoof, the director of the Oscar-nominated refugee drama Das Boot ist voll (The Boat Is Full, CH 1981), was a flamboyant Fip-Fop aficionado, as he recently avowed with a big smile.24

children with film (see Zimmermann 2011). Besides, if one takes into account the second player in the non-commercial child cinema sector, the Schweizer Schul- und Volkskino, which regularly screened industrial films in its pre-program, the ‘orphan’ status that film studies have ascribed to corporate film and its practices would certainly be heavily contested by such an oral history study.

23 ‘Excorporation’ is a process by which subordinates make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system (Fiske 2003, 114).

24 Personal conversation with the author, November 7, 2008.
Why are the memories of the Fip-Fop Club so present today? Are they related to the specific mode of film reception within the Club? Or more generally, do different dispositifs of film reception produce different memories of spectatorship? The Fip-Fop case suggests a positive answer to the latter question. The persistence of memory corresponds with the formative nature of Fip-Fop spectatorship in that it involved four key experiences: first, the shows provided children with the famous ‘first time’ – the first time of going to the movies, of watching a Charles Chaplin movie etc. First time experiences are primal experiences, and ought to be recorded as primal memories. A second reason lies in the restricted frequency of the shows. Being rare and outstanding events in daily life, they assumed a festive character. Festive moments are more easily memorised than daily routine. Third, the film shows involved social exchange. As Knut Hickethier has shown, media events are more likely to qualify as great experience and lingering memory if they are tied to social interactions that provide an active reference frame to memories (2000, 152). Finally, children made collective film experiences in the shows. Collective spectatorship, I would argue, provides a double-bound social memory hook for being not only socially framed, but in itself a social activity. Fip-Fop experiences are thus engraved fourfold in the memories of individual media biographies for being primal, festive, social, and collective experiences.

Collective film reception not only produced lasting collective memories, but also sustained communities. Thus, a circle of former Fip-Fop members in Martigny, a small town in the Lower Valais, has maintained the Fip-Fop Club in an informal way. Once a year, they gather to cultivate the friendship made during collective film consumption in childhood. One of the members puts it as follows:

Comme vous voyez, là, c’est la grande famille, c’est l’amitié, le verre à la main. Et comme on aimait bien le Fip Fop, les séances du Fip-Fop, ces rencontres on se disait pourquoi ne pas continuer, mais d’une manière un peu différente […]. C’était pour se retrouver en équipe, mais actuellement c’est clair, on n’échange plus d’images, on échange plutôt le verre de l’amitié.25

This account confirms the ‘excorporation’ of spectatorship from its original institutional frame and its incorporation into people’s private social life.

25 Filmtexte. Der Fip-Fop-Klub (http://www-x.nzz.ch/format/broadcasts/transcripts_126_66.html; accessed January 24, 2009). [“You see, it’s about family, friendship, sharing a glass of wine. Since we loved Fip Fop, the Fip-Fop screenings and meetings, we thought why not continue, but in a slightly different way […]. We wanted to come together again as we used to, but of course, we don’t trade cards any more; we rather have a drink among friends.”]
As such, it evidences the long-term community-building power of collective film reception by underscoring spectatorship’s social capacity to emanate and emancipate from the media dispositif. The imagined community of the Fip-Fop family has become social reality.

**De-familiarizing cinema from a non-theatrical perspective**

Fip-Fop spectatorship thus amounted to more than film reception. It was the collective experiencing of performative audience participation in interactive live and media events. What made the Club a success with child audiences was first and foremost its alternative dispositif of collective film consumption. Such collective spectatorship has proven to be a highly productive and sustainable reception mode in regard to consumer activism, community building, and remembrance on the one hand, and a successful social technique to introduce children to consumer culture by training and entertaining them with media culture on the other.

The Fip-Fop case calls attention to alternative dispositifs of film consumption beyond commercial cinema. Focusing on non-theatrical film exhibition and reception practices could not just add to the knowledge of a wide field still heavily under-researched, but also disclose the functions and functioning of film in different social spheres and on different incentives over time. The power of collective film consumption both to incorporate individuals into communities and to ‘excorporate’ experiences from institutional frames as well as its emanating and emancipating from the media dispositif are cases in point.

Adopting an approach from the non-theatrical angles of visual culture may also inform the history of cinema in that it helps de-familiarize spectatorship in movie theatres commonly characterized as the individual reception of narrative features. Re-evaluating cinema spectatorship under the comprehensive notion of the dispositif, as Kessler puts it, shifts attention, among others, from the film as text and/or a single narrative to a category that has widely been neglected up to now: the program and its modes of exhibition and reception. Currently, research on programs is largely confined to Early Cinema, to avant-garde and experimental film, and to television.26 With the (presumed) demise of Early Cinema, academic interest

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26 For an overview of programming practices, see Klippel 2008; on Early Cinema see, among others, Kessler/Lenk/Loiperdinger 2002; Elsaesser 2002; Bloom 2003; Hagener 2006; Haller 2008.
in theatrical programs has also largely come to an end – even though it is commonly acknowledged that the introduction of feature-length narratives did not change the fact that cinema-going has always involved more than going to see a single movie. The prolific modes of presentation and reception of programs in non-commercial dispositifs might sensitize reception studies to the theatrical screening and viewing of short formats such as commercials, newsreels, and documentaries that accompanied the one or double features. Alternative dispositifs of film reception could thus help reframe spectatorship in cinema.

References


